

an introduction

MODERN DUTCH PAINTING

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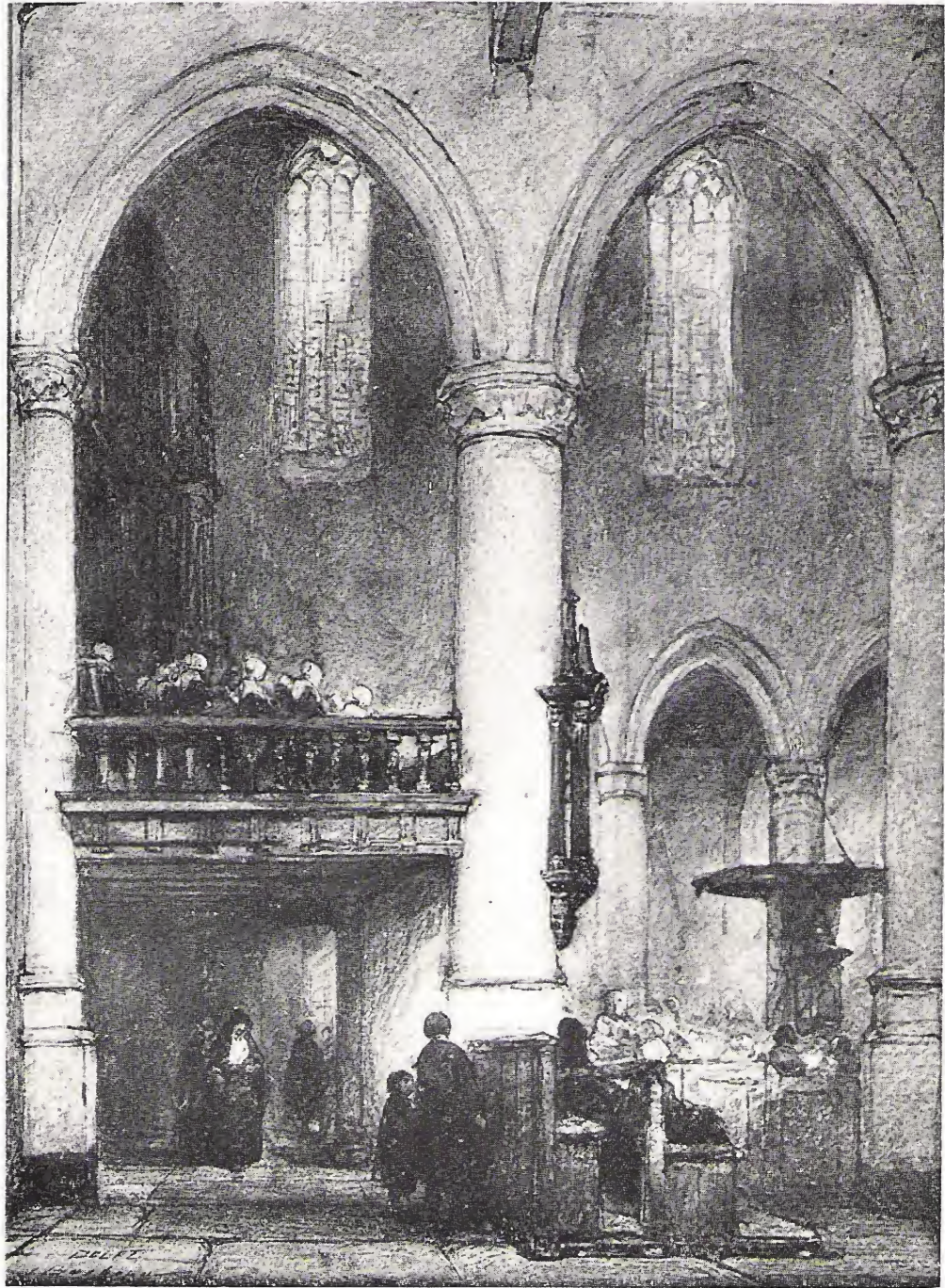
About this Book. This publication is meant as an introduction. The world is called small these days, but it is not so small for the modern artist. His struggle to get exhibited in his own country is as nothing compared to that of obtaining a showing abroad. For a Dutch painter, the way to the United States is a long one, and the obstacles are not even limited to the artistic field. A description and a number of reproductions can do no justice to a painter; but they can at least present his calling-card. While not replacing exhibitions, such a book might lead to them.

Since the purpose here is presentation, I have tried hard for objectivity. At this, your first meeting with a whole new group of artists, what is important is their work and not the clever things a critic has to say about them. Yet a book means selection, and selection is subjective. There is no doubt that I have failed to mention artists of importance; and fifty years from now a choice of this kind might look very different indeed.

The painters whom we want to introduce are especially those who lived after Vincent van Gogh. The narrative starts half a century earlier, because the artist does not work in a vacuum and he cannot properly be described without a frame of reference.

A surfeit of comparisons, tracing of influences, classifications and sub-classifications, however, has been considered a great danger. The critic always risks being carried away on these, to a point where nobody cares to follow him. This is just the story of a group of people you might be interested in meeting and knowing more about.

H. K.



The Landscape in Stone and Wood — Johannes Bosboom: *Church In Delft*

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The Landscape for Its Own Sake. Not much more than a hundred years ago The Netherlands rediscovered its own masters of the seventeenth century such as Jan Vermeer, Rembrandt and Frans Hals. This renewed interest had taken a rather round-about route. The influence of seventeenth century Dutch realism had worked back to Holland through the English painters William Turner and John Constable, and through French artists like Courbet, Millet and Corot. Most of all, it was — as always in such cases — the spirit of the period which made painter and public receptive for the first time to the greatness of those men.

It would be stretching a point to say that it was rediscovery of its own seventeenth century which brought about a revival of Dutch painting. Certainly the painters themselves did not feel it as such. Others might argue that the actual revival, which led to a series of important works, should be placed much later in time. Obviously there is no sharp line which can be drawn at any given moment. Yet it was around the middle of the nineteenth century that painting in The Netherlands freed itself of a highly sterile isolation and took a new look at life.

In the year 1854 the Frenchman Gustave Courbet had pictured himself in shirt-sleeves, setting out for a day's painting. A few years later Francois Millet exhibited "The Gleaners." Those who are appalled at what is now called modern art would do well to remember that those paintings were in their time considered highly revolutionary. Art had been both official and romantic. That there could be dignity and beauty in a man without a coat, in three farm-women at work, that, in short, the artist creates beauty freely, had long been forgotten. Courbet and the other painters of the School of Barbizon were announcing the value of artistic sincerity as against the clichés of beauty, the nymphs in pastures and rose-cheeked cherubims.

The reemergence of realism in Holland followed the same lines, and took place some years later than Barbizon. Here too a very definite group of painters carried the flag, and since most of them worked in The Hague, this development is called THE SCHOOL OF THE HAGUE.

The realism of the men of The Hague was primarily centered on nature. The landscape ceased to be the background to a shepherd's idyl; it was again painted for its own sake. Yet there was an unmistakeable difference from the great Dutch landscapists of the seventeenth century. Then Nature had been the mirror of Divine Omnipotence. Now it was reflecting and expressing man's emotions.

In the year 1870 the School of The Hague was at its height. The Hague was the center of an active art life, and in Pulchri Studio the painters met to discuss their work. The oldest of them was JOHANNES BOSBOOM (1817-1891).

Bosboom's works are a documentation of realism conquering romanticism. Through the years his painting became simpler and of deeper meaning. The anecdotal subject vanished from his canvas. In his later years he confined himself more and more to watercolors, working in Rembrandtesque compositions of darkness and light.

The landscape Bosboom preferred to paint above all others was a singular one, composed of stone and wood. It was the interior of the Protestant church. The extreme soberness of the Dutch Protestant churches, in which the light is the main element of decoration and beauty, gives them indeed a natural aesthetic quality which seems not brought about by man. Bosboom never tired of painting this.

Working in The Hague in those same years was the landscapist par excellence, JOHANNES WEISSENBRUCH (1824-1903). He too showed a progress from abundance to simplicity and grandeur. He was obsessed by the Dutch sky, with its towering clouds and hazy atmosphere. In his "silver" paintings, where a farmhouse is silhouetted under a clear grey sky, the grey light caught again in a canal, a single figure accentuating the loneliness, he is very much the creator of a Dutch style.

Consciously returning to Rembrandt as a source was JOSEPH ISRAELS (1824-1911). Returning to The Netherlands after a period of study in Paris, he soon became one of the foremost realists of The Hague. Israels tried to give a deeper human meaning to his work by his choice of subject. He turned to the poor around him, the fishermen of Scheveningen and the toiling farmers. Titles such as "Alone in the world" and "Walking past mother's grave" show that he did not manage to



Willem Maris: *The Cow*

escape the anecdotal, and looked for associations of the mind to heighten the emotional impact of his pictures. Yet his brush does not disappoint, and his fine and living light shows him to be a painter of class and no mere sentimentalist.

Of great importance in the School of The Hague were the three Maris brothers, many of whose works have been brought to the United States. JACOB MARIS (1837-1899), the oldest, went through a period of intense influence by Vermeer and later by the Barbizon School. After 1870 he began to develop his own style. He painted landscapes and towns, very typical views, seen against a strong light, the colors green and golden. He tried to escape the tendency to mirror nature or to copy illustrious examples. The personal emotion of the artist gives the unity to our subject, he claimed. This theory had a profound influence on his circle,

and was one of the signs of the coming break with "naturalism."

His brother MATTHIJS MARIS (1839-1917) was a lonely man. In realism he searched for the poetic. He painted in isolation and his work tended ever more toward mysticism. His ghosts "which had more reality than pastures in the sunlight" found little understanding, and in 1877 he left for England. There his colors lost their last intensity, and he painted his portraits of women, dark and misty impressions, which after long scrutiny reveal his genius.

The youngest brother WILLEM MARIS (1844-1910) was very much a The Hague-man. He was the painter of the Dutch landscape of cows, ducks, little lakes, a dog, a cat, horses. Rarely taking up other subject matter, his colors became richer, his light more radiant through the years. In his unerring attention to the problem of light he came close to the impressionists.

Among the other painters who influenced, and were influenced by the School of The Hague is WILLEM ROELOFS, a landscapist important for his drawings. HENDRIK WILLEM MESDAC, another of the artists of that period with an impressive devotion to one subject, became the painter of the sea. His are the barges of Scheveningen, and the North Sea in all its moods from storm to nostalgic, foggy calm. ANTON MAUVE was the most tender of his school. He was influenced by the Maris brothers and Millet. His brush drew in fine and airy lines. His are the dunes, sheep on the wide plains, the evenings, all in grey and silvery tones.

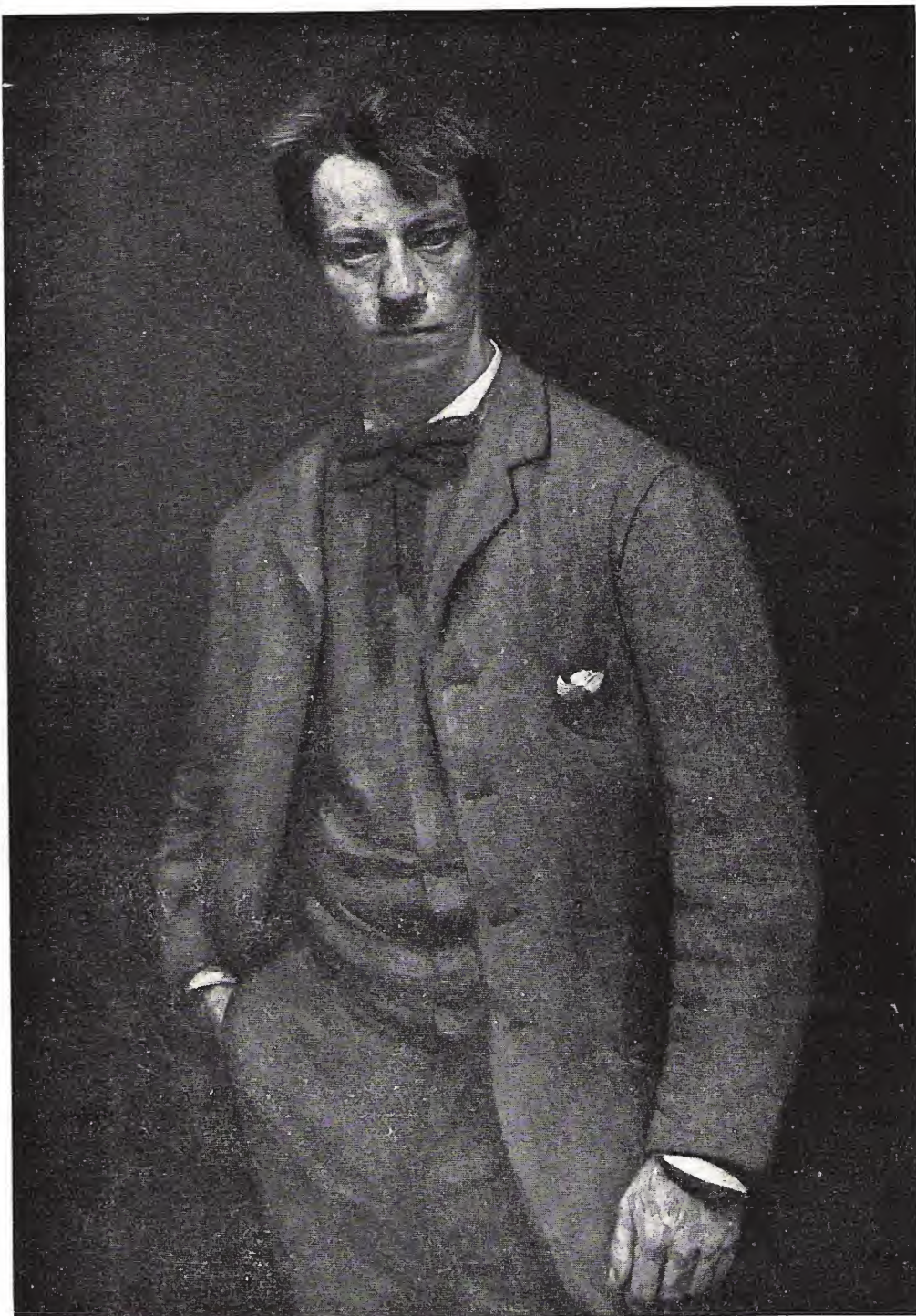
The School of The Hague was not a static group; it had its old and its new generation, and was in continuous movement. No sooner was realism refound than it was felt as a bond. Israels introduced social content, Matthijs Maris looked for a higher reality in mysticism. Jacob Maris took the most revolutionary step by hinting that the emotion of the artist was as important as the aspect of things. But the romantic past was never completely forgotten, and the painter did not abandon the conception of a painting as a closed and careful composition. No doubt there sometimes was a certain complacency in this portrayal of Nature, in which man could recognize his most graceful emotions but where his suffering found no place.

The Amsterdam Academy. Opposition to "The Hague" was born and grew both within that circle and outside of it. A group of painters in Amsterdam set out to put Man back into the center of things, not only as a part of nature but as the most important aspect of reality. In its beginnings this reaction did not mean much more than that the accent in subject-matter shifted from the landscape to the town and the portrait. After the appointment in 1880 of the painter Allebé to the directorship of the Amsterdam Academy of Arts, that city took the lead from The Hague as the center of painting.

AUGUST ALLEBÉ (1838-1927) was not a great painter but he was a great teacher. In his younger years he was much impressed by the romantic work of Delacroix, and that influence remained visible all his life. A painting like his "Portrait of a young woman" of 1863, now in the Rijksmuseum (State Museum) in Amsterdam, shows him as a distinguished artist. He was too balanced, too civilized almost, to arrive at strong emotion. These were the very qualities that made his activity as a professor such a success.

Allebé's group has been labeled the SCHOOL OF AMSTERDAM, but it actually did not show enough cohesiveness to justify the name of school. The critic A. M. Hammacher has called those painters the Amsterdam impressionists; others have objected to that. One might say that most of them stopped one step short of the French impressionism of their day, and that the most brilliant of them all, George Breitner, went one step further. Of him we will speak later.

ANTON DERKINDEREN (1859-1925) was a prominent pupil of Allebé and his successor at the Academy of Arts. His life was marked by a series of commissions for murals which took him years to finish. He worked for four years (until 1888) on one of his early murals, for a Catholic church in Amsterdam, which was only accepted some time after his death. Derkinderen's main interest, after murals, was stained-glass windows. His art was strongly social and religious, and he put down his ideas in a considerable number of writings. In his religious work his style underlines the supernatural character of the subject. There is a conscious effort to recapture something of the spirit of the Middle Ages. By this, he became the first of the modern Dutch monu-



Jan Veth: *Portrait of The Poet Albert Verwey*

mentalists—artists striving “to paint for everybody” through the use of simple, permanent symbols, and rejecting the idea of art for art’s sake.

HENDRIK HAVERMAN, another pupil of Allebé, was one of the foremost portraitists of the period. He and his contemporary JAN VETH have left us with a complete gallery of the prominent men of Holland around the year 1900. Veth was a writer too, and he played a part in the revival of Dutch literature of that same time.

The Men Who Went South. The classification of art into schools and currents has some reality, but remains primarily an aid to our habit of thinking in categories. The story of art is a very different one from, say, the story of the automobile engine, and the concept of “progress” cannot be used effectively. When a trend is traced here from one painter to the next, there is no implication that the latter is “better” than the former. All this becomes obvious whenever a man of genius stands up who defies attempts to put him in a neat sequence after A and before B.

Going back somewhat in time, we find such a man in JOHAN BARTHOLD JONGKIND (1819-1891). Jongkind lived the best part of his life in France, where he went in 1845 on a scholarship awarded him by the Prince of the Netherlands, the future King William III. He continued to visit his own country, but his influence was felt mostly in France.

Jongkind was a painter by birth, a man happy only when he could work at or discuss his art. Intensely earnest, he went through spells of melancholy and even of persecution mania whenever he lost confidence in his own ability. His friends constantly encouraged him and made him persevere. His group had chosen Normandy for its area of operation, and it was here that the “plein air” method was initiated.

The open-air school came into being at a time in which painters, trained at the academies to base their pictures on the classical methods of shading, continued all their lives to paint things as they “ought to look.” The painter of the open air discovered that if we look at things under the sky instead of under a directed northern studio light, we do not see individual objects each with its own color, but rather “a bright medley of tones.” It was this revolution in the conception of color and of form, emerging against violent opposition by public and critics, which led to Impressionism.

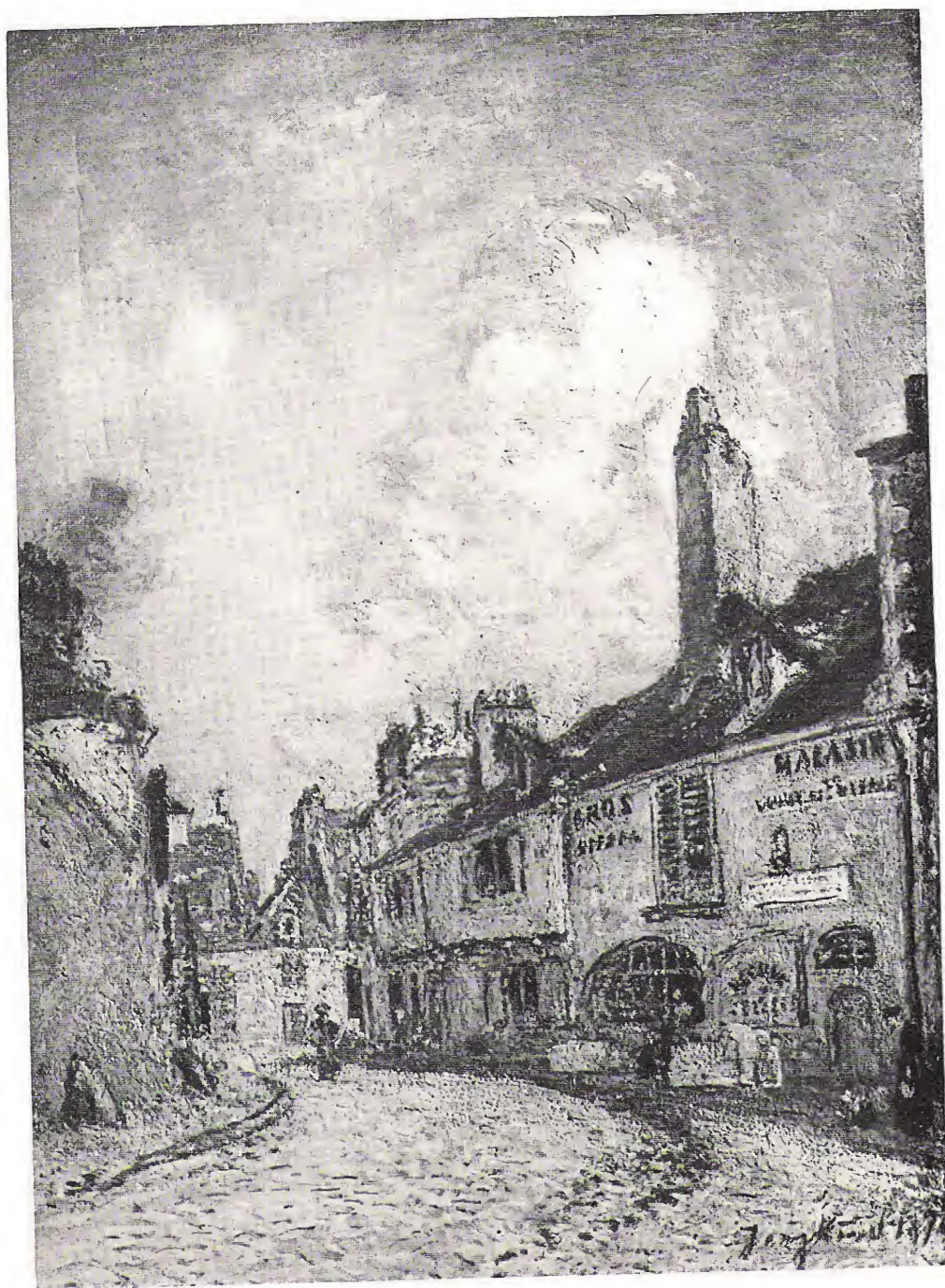


Johan Barthold Jongkind: *Moonlight*

Jongkind himself did not actually complete his pictures under the sky. He worked in sketches and watercolors, using nature for the first design. The painters of the academies did the same, but then went back to their studios to fill in all the details. Jongkind did not fill in details. Thinking in the opposite way, he omitted the constructions of the mind. By painting the same scene again and again he finally arrived, through an iron self-discipline, at the essence of his subject as it “really” looked.

In two pictures of the Nôtre Dame of Paris seen from afar, he thus painted it each time exactly as he saw it. Once, in the bright light of a winter morning, in all the clearness of its structure, and once, under a sunset, as a shadowy mass—an impression. Now, almost a hundred years afterward, this seems quite acceptable. But during his lifetime Jongkind shared all the ire and ridicule which was heaped on the impressionists. He exhibited in the Salon of the Rejected with Manet and Pissarro, and with Cézanne who had failed the entrance examination for the Ecole des Beaux Arts.

Jongkind’s influence was strongest through Claude Monet. They had



Johan Barthold Jongkind: *Nevers (France)*

met in Le Havre in 1862, where Jongkind — then in his forties — was working in the open-air group. They became very close friends, and Monet later called him “. . . my real master; it was to him that I owe the final education of my eye.”

Jongkind was a painter of light, of moonlight on canals, on the sea under a hazy sky, and on the landscapes and streets of France. “Le Faubourg Saint-Jacques,” picturing a Paris suburb, shows us a wide and white, empty street. The sky is of a threatening darkness, a single ray of sunlight blinks in it. There is absolute loneliness, without effects. Here, as in his watercolors, Jongkind attained an atmosphere which proclaimed him one of the pioneers of impressionism.

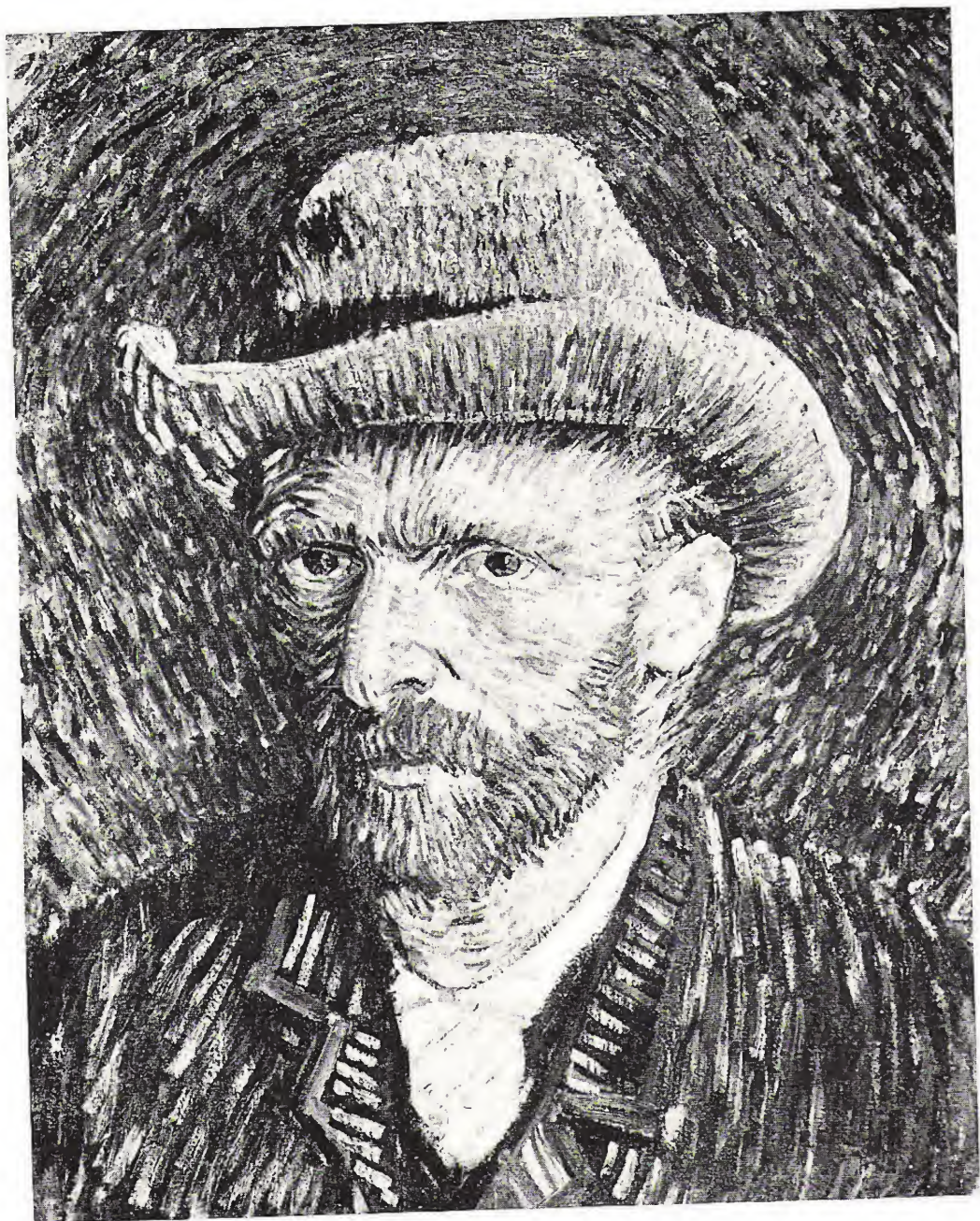
There is another Dutch painter of this period linked with France; a man without followers or pupils, but of an influence difficult to exaggerate, a painter of genius working in unmitigated loneliness — VINCENT VAN GOGH. He was too poor to pay for his own paint; the public discovered him after his death, and the price today for a good reproduction of one of his landscapes of Arles would have paid for his stay there. So much has been written about him in America as in Europe that it would be pretentious to do much more here than recapitulate a few facts.

Vincent was born in the Dutch province of Brabant in 1853, the son of a vicar. From 1878 to 1880 he worked in the Borinage, the Belgian mining district. In the autumn of 1880 he started drawing “with all his might.” There was a brief period of work in The Hague at the studio of his uncle, Anton Mauve, and then came his dark and terrifying paintings of the Dutch peasants of Brabant: The Nuenen Period, 1883-1885.

In 1886 Vincent van Gogh came to Paris to live with his brother Theo who ran a little art gallery, and to see the impressionists about whom his brother had written him. Vincent was at first overwhelmed by their brilliant hues, but he did not hesitate to experiment himself and soon completely changed his northern colors.

Theo introduced him to Pissarro, who expounded his theories to him and later stated that “Vincent would either go mad or leave the impressionists far behind.” Those predictions were both to come true.

In 1888 Van Gogh went south, to Arles, his brother financing the journey. He hoped that if he could work there in quiet for some years he might one day be able to sell his pictures and repay Theo. From



Vincent van Gogh: *Self Portrait*



Vincent van Gogh: *House in Arles*

Arles he confided all his ideas in his letters to Theo, which chronicle his intense creative struggle. Less than a year was given him there. In December he broke down and suffered an attack of insanity, but he continued to paint at intervals. In May 1889 he entered a mental asylum. In the following year he put an end to his life, dying at the same age as Raphael.

In his ten years as a painter he had broken all the bonds he found, had defied convention and "likeness." He painted in a frenzy — his shoes, his room, the cypresses of Arles, the hills of Saint-Rémy, the wheat fields of Auvers-sur-Oise, sunflowers, the sun. The tension of his brush-strokes has never been equalled; his colors came to dominate many palettes. His dark period too influenced the colors of a number of painters, especially in Holland. The road he took, away from a simpler realism, was hard to follow but pointed the way to the expressionism which was to emerge in Holland, Flanders and Germany.

Van Gogh worked in a higher reality than that of the things and men around us. He recreated these on a plane which touches the earth but reaches to heaven. In his painting, soul triumphed over matter.

The Works of Man. One of the painters with whom Van Gogh had some contact during his brief stay in The Hague was GEORGE HENDRIK BREITNER (1857-1923) who was destined to become the outstanding artist of his day in The Netherlands. The work of Breitner showed the future expressionists a new direction — less startling than Van Gogh's and easier to pursue, but almost as clear and of no less sincerity. His technique was steeped in impressionism, but his ambitions reached farther than the "scientific seeing." The non-realism of strong, perhaps sometimes literary emotion augmented his vision. He found understanding in his lifetime, but he now seems underestimated; in the United States few know his art.

Breitner attended classes at the Academy of The Hague and worked for some time in the studio of Willem Maris. In 1886 he turned his back on that circle and moved to Amsterdam which had become the more alive center of painting.

He began to document the growth of that city at the end of the nineteenth century, and his vision "entered her intimacy" as nobody's since. He painted his town-scapes in red, beige, white and all hues of grey, in



George Hendrik Breitner: *Dam Square In Amsterdam*

large and light unities. He painted the wreckers, the groundworkers and the builders, the Amsterdam canals in the snowy dullness of a Dutch winter afternoon. He painted the Army, manoeuvres in the dunes, cavalry on the heath. He painted indoors many women, warm nudes in a spiritual and yet sensual color which was new to the Protestant North.

There is his large canvas of the Dam Square in Amsterdam, to which a reproduction can do little justice. Rain, the grey sky, the gleaming street, the gentlemen with their umbrellas, combine in a breathtaking wholeness of creative feeling. There is his painting of the Rokin-canal at night, the round old stone bridge, and the gas-lights reflecting in the snow. A few daubs of yellow color, in which all the nostalgia of youth, of forgotten expectations, of things gone by, is caught.

FLORIS VERSTER, a pupil of Breitner although only four years his junior, was a passionate painter who consciously disciplined his wild colors by periods in which he worked on simple and severe compositions. Adopting the methods of impressionism and of Breitner, he became an inspired painter of still lifes, of bunches of flowers in gay green, red and blue. For these, the German critic Friedrich Huebner has called him the



George Hendrik Breitner: *The Building Site*



Willem van Konijnenburg: *Harrowing Farmer*

first "color-idealist . . . of the new colors discovered by Van Gogh, that is, non-naturalistic but with a value in themselves," who however "fails to shake off his Puritan anxieties."

The Line of Symbolism. At the close of the nineteenth century the Victorian world was in flux, although the currents did not yet show on the surface. Among the pupils of Allebé in Amsterdam there was a growing reaction against the theories of impressionism. In art as in literature a romantically conceived socialism was capturing the mind. Van Gogh had abandoned impressionism, but his was still a lonely road. Breitner, the individualist, had not gone far enough. These later painters dreamt of "the new commonwealth of mankind," and the place of art therein had to be a different one. The bourgeois bought bad pictures in abundance, and sometimes even good ones; that was not enough. It was the artist's responsibility to help relieve the people of the weight of machine-made ugliness which the nineteenth century had imposed upon them.

Anton Derkinderen, with his strong predilection for medieval art, had been the first to embrace this concept. Jan Veth had put it in writing. Leaving still farther behind the reproduction of nature was WILLEM VAN KONIJNENBURG (1868-1943). He held that not the subject, but the style in which it was presented, should be "idealized." He and his group, paying close attention to the English pre-Raphaelites and to William Morris, tried for a "linear idealism" that would be an intellectual and symbolic expression of the new ideas.

Van Konijnenburg went through a period of Barbizon and one of impressionism. At the end of the century he began to develop a style of his own, in which he tried to give only the essentials of form. "The work of art is neither sad nor joyful," he wrote, "it must attain monumentality without passion . . . The regular, mathematically given figures and their developments are the basis of the accidental appearances of matter. Naturalism is lack of sensitivity." In this linear idealism the lines harden, they become the shortest connection between the basic points, devoid of all playfulness; color becomes a filler between them. The subjects thus represented also lose their spontaneity, they have to serve the idea, which is "the heroifying of matter, the struggle between light and dark."



Jan Toorop: *Petrus The Apostle* (Drawing)

It has been said of these painters that they wrote better than they painted. Basically, their handicap consisted of the purely intellectual construction of their symbols. This was a far cry from the symbolism of the Middle Ages, which spoke directly of life and death, heaven and hell, to every onlooker. The modern symbolism was bound to irritate. Its intellectual dryness could not fulfil the promises of elation which the theory made. It was none the less important as an experiment and as a purification of painting and of architecture by the strength of its honesty.

JOHAN THORN PRIKKER found a natural field for linear idealism in the decorative arts. He worked in murals, stained-glass windows, clay and even textile design. The discipline imposed by architectural space and by his materials forced him to more and more simple patterns, which led to a true monumentality. His symbolism thus became less self-conscious and he achieved rhythm and feeling. His influence in Holland was lessened because of a prolonged stay in Germany, where he was invited to teach art. R. N. ROLAND HOLST, professor and later director of the Amsterdam Academy, abandoned Breitner for the decorative linear style under the influence of Derkinderen and William Morris. He too accentuated the geometric composition and the decorative aspects of painting; art "had to serve." His posters and his stained-glass windows were important.

JAN TOOROP (1858-1928) has been called an a-personality, a mirror in which France and Belgium are reflected. He experimented with all the contradictory theories of his day. In linear idealism he found a true style of his own, and he gave it a new importance.

Jan Toorop was born in the then Dutch East Indies. He studied at the Amsterdam Academy, where he was influenced by Breitner, then by Morris. He joined the opposition against the impressionists and arrived at a symbolism which had an exotic flavor. In that way, he became typical of many Dutch artists who lived or had lived in the East Indies.

Toorop too was interested in the restoration of unity between painter and architect. The frescoes he did in the new Amsterdam Exchange built by the architect of rationalism, A. P. Berlage, gave him a chance to make these concepts reality. In his numerous religious paintings he escaped the sterility of intellectual symbolism.

How fascinating it is to compare his "Seascape" of 1899 (in the Rijksmuseum of Amsterdam) with one of the many Mesdag did in the style of The Hague. Toorop here employed a pointillist technique. The waves are fine horizontal lines on the canvas, three boats are decoratively placed in the misty atmosphere. There is no awe in his confrontation of the elements, no simple emotion of man in his smallness face to face with infinity. A human, order-creating element has entered nature. The artist was no longer solely concerned with the emotions evoked in him by reality. Rather, he had begun to use reality as a means of self-expression.

A Look At The Twentieth Century. We have now come to those painters who are, whether living or deceased, our contemporaries; and our task becomes so much the harder. From here on we must be more careful than ever about grouping artists into styles and schools. Not only because it is so dangerous to put a painter still in development into some cubicle, but also because art itself in this century has become fundamentally *experimental*.

When we survey the Dutch scene, we see how here as elsewhere a number of painters isolated themselves from all violent shocks and changes and continued in classic realism or impressionism. Among the latter is the group of paintresses known as the "Amsterdam maidens" and containing such excellent craftswomen as Coba Ritsema and Betsy Westendorp-Osieck. Besides traditionalism, we find the continuation of the revolution of Van Gogh and of Gauguin and Cézanne. We see painters who completely adapt themselves to Paris, others who find basically Dutch solutions to the influences of expressionism, cubism, futurism and abstractionism. Making a very broad division, we observe how some abandon all obvious and direct contact with seen reality and how others continue to put this reality on their canvas, while striving for an "added dimension" of the mind and the soul.

KEES VAN DONGEN, born in 1877, has worked in Paris since he was twenty years old. In 1905 a group of young artists exhibited in Paris who became known as *Les Fauves*, the wild ones, for their disregard of natural form and their violent colors. Henri Matisse was one of the most important of them. It was here that Van Dongen found a home for his interest and joy in color, which has dominated him ever since. With Matisse, Derain and Dufy he collaborated in the revolutionary attack



Kees van Dongen: *Nude*

on the palette inherited from impressionism.

Van Dongen later returned to more traditional colors, but they remained strong and he often did his background in a pure complementary hue. His light is fierce, and a means to an end rather than part of the scene he is painting.

Success came early in life to Kees van Dongen. He became the portraitist of the Paris *monde* and *demi-monde*, and a famous man-about-town. Many critics, and especially those in his country of origin, which looked at his exuberance rather sourly, have since held that all this acclaim was detrimental to the painter. Actually it seems to fit well enough with the idea one forms of the man. Working hard and not very perturbed by the artistic strife around him, Van Dongen needed nothing but his creative instinct for a guiding-star. Thus has he produced an impressive number of works, full of gaiety and wildness, among them many portraits of "decadent" people but just as many of quite healthy and simple souls. His own words may give a final clue to his character: "painting is the most beautiful lie," he once declared. "Life is beautiful, and this work is even more beautiful than life."

A painter kindred in spirit to Van Dongen, more grave but as much a "man of his time," is JAN SLUYTERS, who was born in 1881.

Sluyters studied at the Amsterdam Academy. The Prix de Rome, which he won in 1904, sent him on a long journey through southern Europe. Since then he has shown many influences and made many experiments. Rejecting traditionalism and impressionism, he did not hesitate to revert to them when it suited his mood. Cézanne and the cubists showed him a way to a greater simplification. During the years of the First World War he tended towards expressionistic form, and he chose scenes from the farmer's life and religious motifs for his subjects. Then he began to paint his nudes, large smooth canvases which significantly have been called "still lifes." Accepting classical anatomy, he rose in his colors to the fantastic. In these paintings, in which the flesh flames against the well-balanced draperies of the background, he shows himself a perfect technician and a man who pictures sensualism in a controlled and methodical way. Since that time he has sought even greater simplicity and naturalness.

Sluyters' virtuosity has had a highly beneficial influence in a time



Jan Sluyters: *Don Quixote*



Leo Gestel: *Dutch Farmers*

when there are more theories than talents in the painting world. His works can be seen in the museums of Paris and Brussels and the three major cities of The Netherlands: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague.

Gestel and The School of Bergen. Another painter of wide influence, on a deeper level, was LEO GESTEL (1881-1941), a brilliant and disciplined artist. Like others of his time in The Netherlands, Gestel followed many trends before he found his own, but he was never eclectic and one has a sensation of growth in the many experiments which he imposed on himself.

Setting out on an exploration of cubism, he arrived at a stylization of form which makes a vase of flowers into a geometric pattern, a portrait a composition of planes. He loved his colors, but did not let himself be carried away by them; he forced them into decorative patterns. "Yet," as one critic wrote, "his geometric woods are filled with the smell of summer."

Then, after a long rest, came a time in which he eased these mathematical rigidities. He had not become a slave of the restrictions he had put on his work, and a period of contact with the Flemish expressionists brought him to his final and decisive phase, expressionism. Again and again he painted his three main motifs: the nude, the workman, the horse; not looking to nature for his final inspiration, but in himself. Here, and in his winter landscapes of snow, bare trees, huddling farm-houses, is matter conquered by the spirit of the artist. "Nature is our source of life," Gestel wrote, "but nature is nature, the work of art is the artist." Many of Gestel's paintings were destroyed by a fire in his studio.

The influence which Gestel had in Holland found form in what is called the SCHOOL OF BERGEN. Again, the word school might have to be used with reservations. In the second decade of this century a group of painters left Amsterdam and settled to work in and around the village of Bergen, an hour to the north of that city. They started out with the same premise, which can tentatively be described as a realism purified by the teachings of Cézanne. The French painter Le Fauconnier, an artist "tempted but not conquered by cubism," worked there during the First World War, and had considerable influence on the group.

In later years the ways these painters took diverged considerably.



Piet Wiegman: *Poolroom*

Cubism never gained a strong foothold in The Netherlands, and the architectonic simplification of Cézanne was in the end less important there than the lyric and expressive simplification which can be found in the works of Van Gogh. Expressionism — form and color subjected to the mind of the artist and “distorted” freely to express his emotion — made its way in Holland as in Belgium and Germany. There is a line running from Van Gogh to Gestel, and many of his group and time, whether they called themselves expressionists or not, have been touched by this movement.

The painters of Bergen have given a strong lead to many Dutch artists. In the thirties the group lost its vigor and cohesion, and the accent shifted once more back to Amsterdam.

Two painters who played a large role in the School of Bergen are the brothers Wiegman. MATTHIEU WIEGMAN, born in 1886, had his training at the Academy of Amsterdam. A strong interest in cubism was visible in his early landscapes. A deep religious consciousness moved him during a period of symbolism, in which he shed all technique and painted his biblical subjects in pale severity. Freeing himself from this harsh constraint, he found a more universal expression. His intelligence always controls his form, but his passionate art has given new life to such often-painted subjects as the “Expulsion from Paradise.”

PIET WIEGMAN, one year younger than his brother, was self-taught. Here too one finds the artist dictating to form. Piet Wiegman’s men and women, ugly and awkward in their lonely rooms, are thus because he wants to paint them that way. But he does not look down upon them with the contempt or the hopelessness of the existentialist. Through the process of artistic creation “their dark destinies are sublimated.”

ARNOUT COLNOT worked in Bergen for twenty years, then returned to Amsterdam. There is much of Cézanne in his beginnings, and he was influenced also by Le Fauconnier. His slow and painstaking conceptions, his building up of a picture, brought him to the motionless subjects: landscapes and still lifes. His colors are dark — brown, black, violet, deep green.



Hendrik Chabot: *Self Portrait*

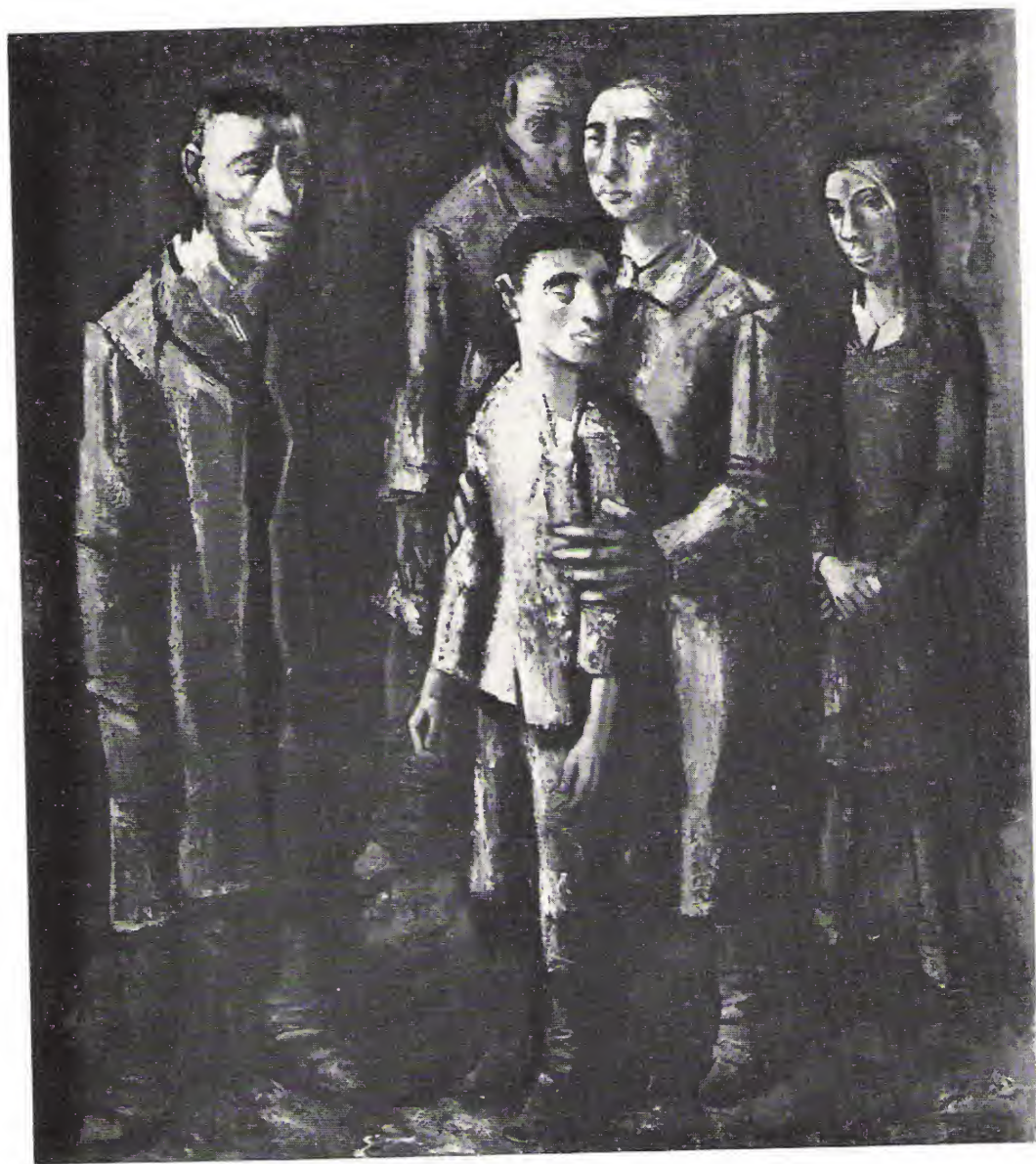
Expressionism Triumphant. Expressionism in Holland has been called the most alive, the most Dutch school of painting. As has been seen here, it has affected the artists of Holland through Bergen. A second source of it was Rotterdam, where young painters during and shortly after the First World War were highly interested in the new, expressionistic developments in German art. It was here that one of Holland's most important modern painters came into contact with it.

HENDRIK CHABOT was born in 1894, and came to Rotterdam at the age of eleven. He lived there or in that area until his death in 1949. Chabot studied at the Rotterdam Academy. In the early twenties he found a form of his own in sculpting, selecting the very hardest stone he could get. In those same years he painted heavy, almost formless seascapes, in which the paint was pressed on the canvas in thick crusts.

In the thirties Chabot's form became freer. His great creativeness emerged in a pure expressionism. His passion was never superficial; he used his deformations only where he needed them to materialize his sentiments. Chabot lived in a little house near the river Rotte which gives Rotterdam its name. This setting, at the *polder*, was as basically and tragically Dutch as any landscape in Holland. It was only a few steps from his workshop to the top of the dike. But he did not work in nature; creation was for him too much contemplation to be accomplished that fast. He worked in paint, in stone, and in clay. His violent brush betrays on closer scrutiny an extremely refined touch. When the war broke out, an anti-aircraft battery was put up near his house and caused him to move many of his paintings to Rotterdam, where they were destroyed in the fires of May, 1940.

Chabot worked through this catastrophe and through illness and war, painting the occupation of his country by the Germans. He painted the fugitives, the hungry, the men in hiding, the flooded fields. After the war his motifs became happier, but the essence of his feeling for mankind remained expressed in the melancholy stare of the tired and the poor on his canvases, in the sun of his landscapes which is but a break in a stormy black sky. His colors, from a dull brown to a sudden warm blue and yellow, became more free. Red appeared on his canvas. Their harmony became more and more simple.

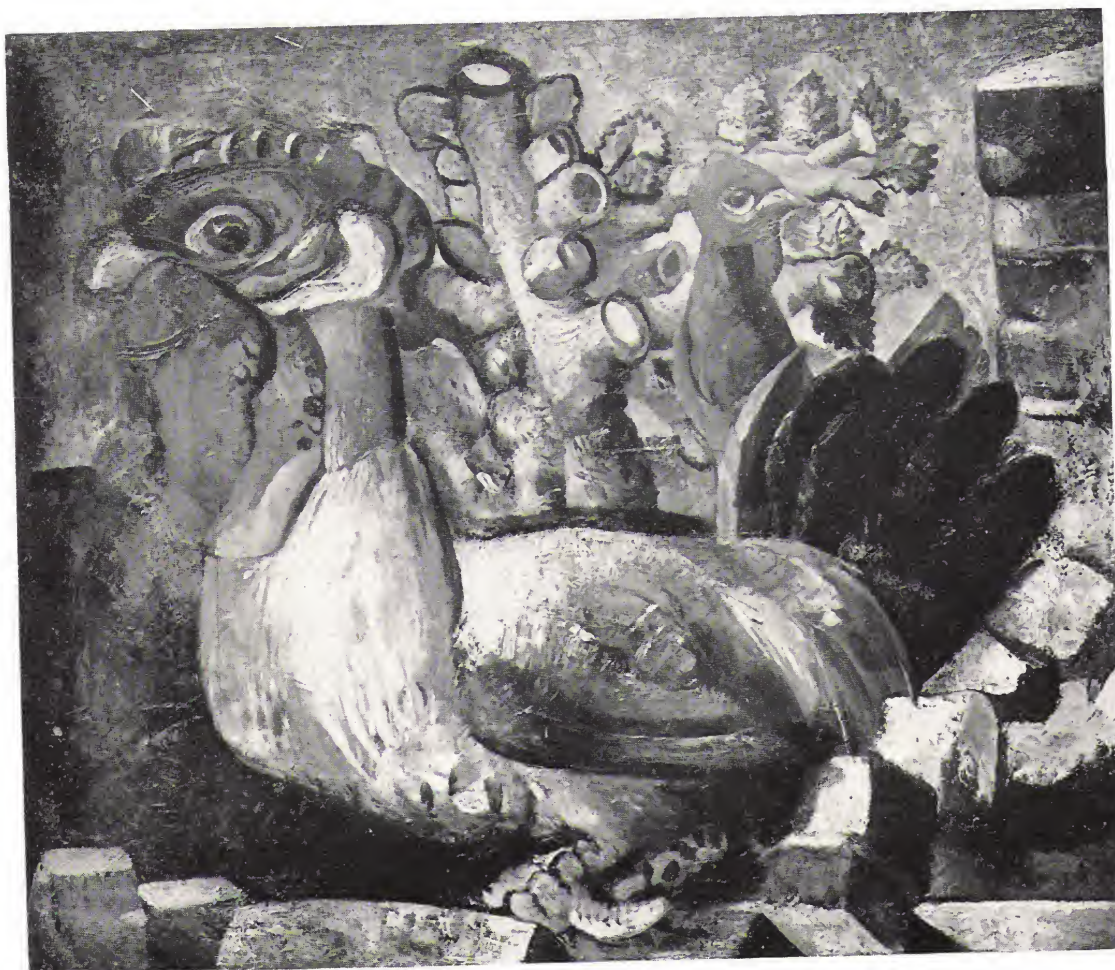
Chabot's work is hard, awkward, tragic, and it carries the mark of genius. In this man was all the power of creation and none of the power



Hendrik Chabot: *Jewish Refugees*

which brings the artist "success." His mind was close to the chaotic, in a religious awe before the suffering of man. He has been called "the only truly religious painter in The Netherlands." He stands near Vincent van Gogh.

"The entrance of Christ in Jerusalem" was the painting on which he worked until a few days before his death. A very un-Italian Christ, a Jewish Christ with dark burning eyes, on the donkey, surrounded by a crowd. There is no space between Him and the spectators, they are conceived in a unity of sharp corners and lines. A red and blue of medieval power lift the image into mystery; the city, vaguely in the background in red and rose, was not finished when Chabot's strength left him.



Herman Kruiders: *Cock*

HERMAN KRUYDER, who lived from 1881 to 1935, began working as a housepainter, then attended art school and worked in a stained-glass window shop. In 1910 he ventured out as a painter.

The life of Kruyder was both lonely and tragic. He found little or no recognition until his later years, and he had no contact with his colleagues. He set out in a romantic realism, then, influenced by Rousseau le Douanier and the Belgian Constant Permeke, came to an ornamental style of painting in broad, clear planes. Freeing himself more and more from all restrictions of technique, he arrived at a highly individualistic expression.

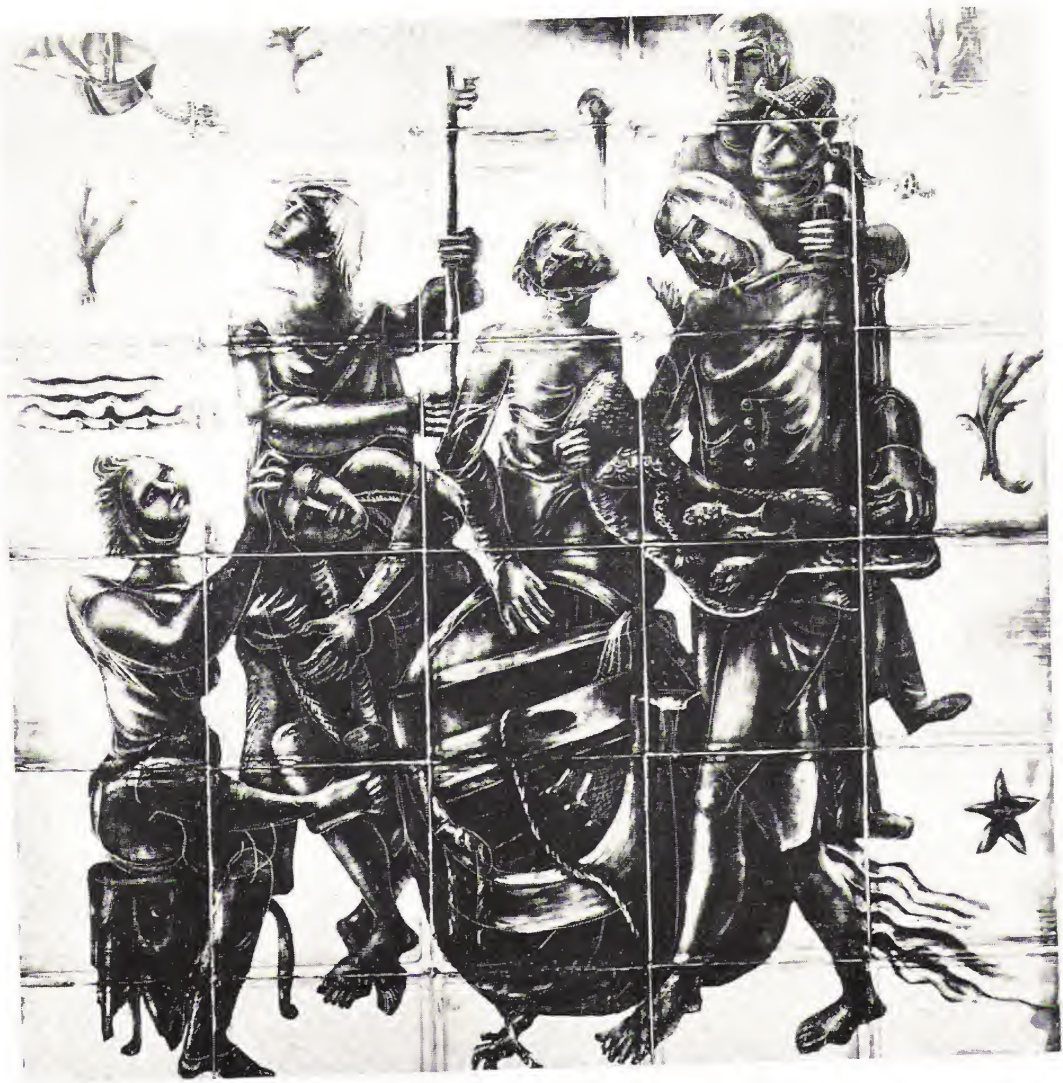
Kruyder's emotions revolve around the concept of fear. He was mentally unbalanced, and the amazement and horror with which the world could fill him was put directly on canvas without a message of salvation. In the seemingly so peaceful rural life around him he became dominated by an obsession with the suffering and abandonment of the animal world.

JACOB BENDIEN (1890-1933) was stopped by an untimely death in a development which led him to see our uncertainties as signs, the intellect as the savior in life. He painted fantastic forms, his expression nearing surrealism. He was seeking new ways, writing shortly before he died: "The art of painting by imitation of nature is based on vision of nature, and is no real art of painting but rather the art of seeing nature . . . the highest art (of painting) is where colors neither harmonize nor clash, but only talk with each other . . ." CHARLES ROELOFS, simpler in his approach, often works in that same borderland between the seen and unseen. In his pictures he sometimes obtains a haunting revelation of the nostalgia of modern man.

JAN WIEGERS, born in 1893, began his artistic life on the scaffold, working as a sculptor in several restoration projects of churches in the northern Netherlands. In 1918 he was one of the leaders of a group of painters in the province of Groningen which called itself "The plow."

Illness brought Wiegiers two years later to a sanatorium in Switzerland. It was here that he was influenced by Ernst Kirchner and other German expressionists. In later years he abandoned the emotional deformation of expressionism but retained the strong simple colors which suited his conception.

A step back in time we find LODEWIJK SCHELFHOUT (1881-1943),



Joep Nicolas: *Design On Glass Brick Wall*

a man very much on his own, who after a period of an intensely colorful palette began to work in sober, severe etchings. His graphic work, built up in architectural discipline, shows cubistic reminiscences and is highly decorative.

A painter who is very much of a builder is JOEP NICOLAS, born in 1897. Nicolas worked in a stained-glass atelier in Limburg, in the south of The Netherlands, and it was in this field that he later acquired fame.

Nicolas has been called both a realist and an expressionist. The accent on one or the other aspect of his work shifts through his lifetime, but a strong quality of Flemish expressionism never disappears from it. His love for a wild play of colors became tempered, and his windows lighter and more monochromatic.

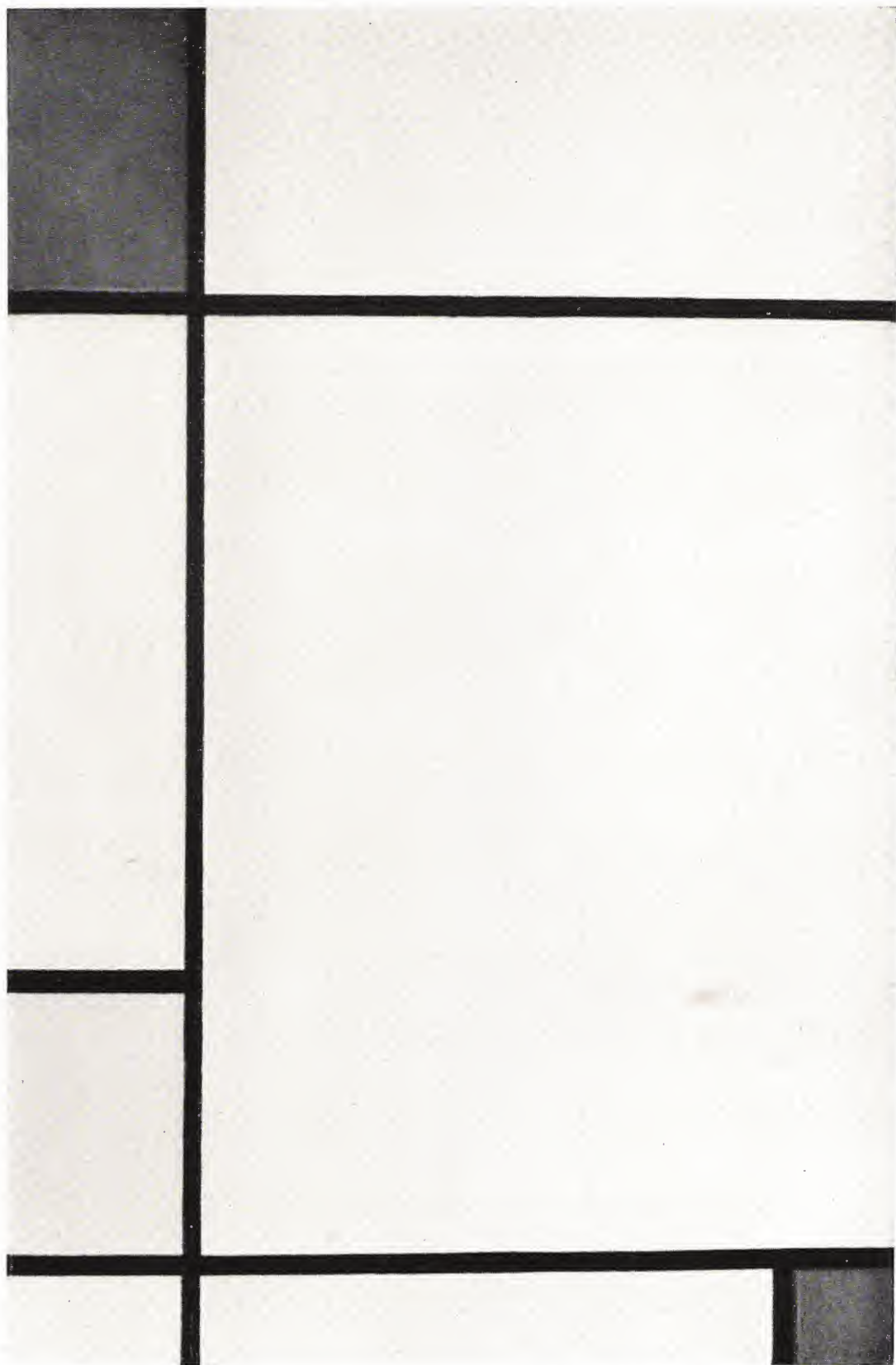
Nicolas's stained-glass windows are elegant and harmonious; the distribution of lead is unrestricted by his forms. "He has secularized the art of the stained-glass without sinning against its spirit, and while raising its technique," the French critic Paul Fierens wrote of him, "he is unequalled in any modern school."

During the Second World War Joep Nicolas worked in the United States, doing among other things stained-glass windows for the Fairmount Church in Cleveland, Ohio. In his later paintings he has experimented with surrealism.

CHARLES EYCK is of the same age as Nicolas and has been strongly influenced by him. In 1922 he won the Prix de Rome. Later he settled in Limburg and worked together with Nicolas, experimenting like him in many forms of expression: sculpture, murals, windows. Eyck has become a representative of a regional Limburgian tendency in Dutch art, doing a number of murals for Catholic churches in a post-impressionistic manner.



Charles Eyck: *Christopher*



Pieter Mondriaan: *Composition*

A New Style. During the same years in which the artists of Bergen were groping for individual solutions to the clash of styles, a group of other painters in The Netherlands undertook a daring adventure in which they held out for nothing less than complete victory over the seemingly insoluble. They worked toward a new philosophy of style. The pioneer of this group was Mondriaan.

PIETER MONDRIAAN was born in 1872, and died in New York in 1944. He worked most of his life in Paris, where he wrote his name Mondrian. He studied at the Amsterdam Academy, and up to the age of thirty five he painted in a naturalistic manner, taking his colors from the *Fauves*. In 1910 Mondriaan went to Paris and was deeply moved by cubism. From then on his road was straight. Where Picasso hesitated and returned to nature, Mondriaan proceeded to the utmost abstraction, to the square and rectangle, and to the primary colors: red, blue and yellow.

In 1914 he was in Holland and the war forced him to stay there. A friend of his described how he walked out under the clear starry night in Zeeland, the Dutch province where he then lived, and came home with a sketch of the sky. He then proceeded to abstract from it, to work away from reality, and thus arrived at a composition of small crosses called "Christmas-mood."

Mondriaan built up a theory of abstraction which he titled *neoplasticism* and he explained his ideas in numerous writings. "Neoplasticism," he wrote, "can also be called abstract realistic painting. For the abstract can be expressed — as in mathematics, but without reaching the absolute as it does there — by a plastic reality. Such is even the characteristic essence of the new plasticism in painting." This new style had to put life and art in balance, and it had to express the very rhythm of life. Forms were sublimated by the pureness of the primary colors and the tension of straight lines.

Mondriaan was an iconoclast. He denied the intermediate function of the image, and he wanted to prove that without help of the old forms a direct communication is possible with "universality."

Those same conceptions were very much alive in another Dutch painter, eleven years younger than Mondriaan. His name was Van Doesburg; he gave shape to a whole new school by founding the movement which he called The Style ("DE STIJL"). That was in 1917. With



Bart Van Der Leek: *Market*

him were Piet Mondriaan and the architect J. J. P. Oud. The Style issued several manifestos, the first one in 1918, and published a magazine which survived Van Doesburg's death in 1931 by only a year. Its influence at home and abroad was widespread.

Mondriaan was back in Paris in those years and living in poverty. Yet he shaped his life into an "oasis of style." His studio was a painting itself. "The walls white planes with squares of blue, red or grey, a square of yellow, some black; on the floor, painted black, he had constructively arranged small grey rugs. A few pieces of furniture, some drawing tables, white, and the victrola (his great passion) painted red . . . the walls in primary colors and the quiet simple furniture formed one large harmony."

Abstraction meant for Mondriaan the abandonment of what is typical and therefore temporary. "The new form," he wrote, "can not be vested in the means which are characteristic of the *own*, the personal." The artist fights this battle of purification within himself, but in order to be successful the example he creates must communicate, must evoke a similar emotion in the spectator. This power of communication Mondriaan did not always achieve; contemplation was perhaps stronger in him than creation. His work sometimes reminds one of the words written on Paul Klee: ". . . it is like the tuning of instruments. One waits for the music which does not come."

Yet it is not enough to look at a painting of his and say, this does not move me. Mondriaan and the neo-plasticists built up a theory of style and from that platform they tried to attain a theory of life and art. They did not create the style-for-every-man they dreamt of, but they did give one to some. They had a profound effect on the architects and the interior decorators. Mondriaan added something "new and beautiful."

In 1938 Mondriaan left Paris for London under the threat of a war which was to catch up with him. In 1940 he was bombed out, and moved to the United States.

Arriving in New York at the age of sixty-eight, this remarkable man took up his work once more with full vigor, and he found perhaps more understanding here than ever before in his life. The American scene fascinated him, and so did American music. "In real boogie-woogie I see a trend kindred to my own," he wrote, "destruction of melody (natural appearances) — construction by continuous contrast of pure

means of expression." And in 1942, as a final word on art: "Art is only a substitute during the time in which the beauty in life is insufficient. Art will vanish when life comes into balance. At the moment it is still of the utmost importance because it demonstrates the law of equilibrium, directly, and independently of individual ideas."

Mondriaan's last work, "Victory Boogie-Woogie," showed that he continued the experiment to the last. It was unfinished when he died. Two years later Amsterdam had a large exhibition of his work, but Europe is still more reluctant in its recognition of him than the United States.

We must now return to the man already mentioned as the founder of the Style movement: THEO VAN DOESBURG (1883-1931), who became the most ardent preacher of the new philosophy.

Van Doesburg emphasized even more than Mondriaan the link between painter and architect. The canvas in a frame did not have his first interest. In the year 1916 a fruitful collaboration began between him and the Dutch architects Oud and Wils. On trips abroad he established new contacts: with Le Corbusier, and with Walter Gropius, who founded the German Bauhaus one year after the birth of The Style in 1917. The next year The Style proclaimed in one of its manifestos: "The object of nature is man. The object of man is style." In 1921 a German group of The Style was started, and the magazine began a German edition.

The accent of The Style on architecture was a happy one, for it was here that a new and lasting style was first accepted, and the concept of functionalism cleared away the deadweight of nineteenth century machine-made knick-knackery. Those who state that they "have no use" for an abstract painting often little realize how that same theory of style has changed their environment, their houses and furniture, the shop-windows and the advertisements they study.

Van Doesburg himself was an architectural painter, and he was perhaps even more important as a propagandist than as an artist. On the unity of painting and building he wrote: "The painting in a frame, with perspective, breaks through a wall in depth, destroys it. A painting "in plane" breaks a wall in height and in width, and preserves it architecturally. A new balance is created."

"Style cannot be born in a distribution of labor in art," he said

elsewhere. "There is no separation between the fine and the applied arts."

Like Mondriaan, Van Doesburg held that painting without perspective, in two-dimensional geometric forms, is actually multi-dimensional because any presentation of the more than two-dimensional in a two-dimensional plane can be done honestly only by abstraction. He stated that such painting, because of the universality of its means, is the only truly universal art. The mind can express itself only by abandoning the three-dimensional ways of representation. Only destruction of nature gives the mind its possibilities for self-expression in new construction.

Van Doesburg made it very clear that he was not interested in aestheticism for its own sake. Style is a way of living. It was here that his group gave impetus to and was carried forward by the new wave of socialism or social consciousness which swept Europe after the First World War.

"The forms of the old culture break down because the essence of a new culture is already present in mankind," he wrote, "... becoming visible first in the few who are the bearers of a new world, a new time. Appearance is exchanged for essence. The incidental becomes determinate; seeming space, space. Instinct becomes mind; war, law; nature, style."

A painter of great consequence, who was a friend of Mondriaan and a prominent member of The Style, is BART VAN DER LECK (B. 1876).

Van der Leck was a pupil of Allebé at the Amsterdam Academy. He worked with a monumentalistic technique in which he abstained from symbols and adhered to nature. His colors were, as if intentionally, without glow. The artist felt however that he could not stop there. Art to him was very much a social force. Art could only become more universal through simplification.

So Van der Leck reduced his forms more and more to their basic patterns, and his colors to the three primary ones, red, yellow and blue, to which he added grey and black, and white backgrounds. The elements of space are replaced by the two-dimensional. Unlike Mondriaan, he does not always abandon the appearances of the world around us. He distributes his figures over his canvas, over and under each other as in Egyptian relief sculpture, and succeeds in attaining balance. Thus he

endeavors to give the "case," the actual subject, its purification, by lifting it up rather than eliminating it.

The social element is very strong in Van der Leck's work, and in his street scenes, soldiers, groups, he obtains an element of "commonwealth," an emotion of our common destiny, by the very omission of the typical.

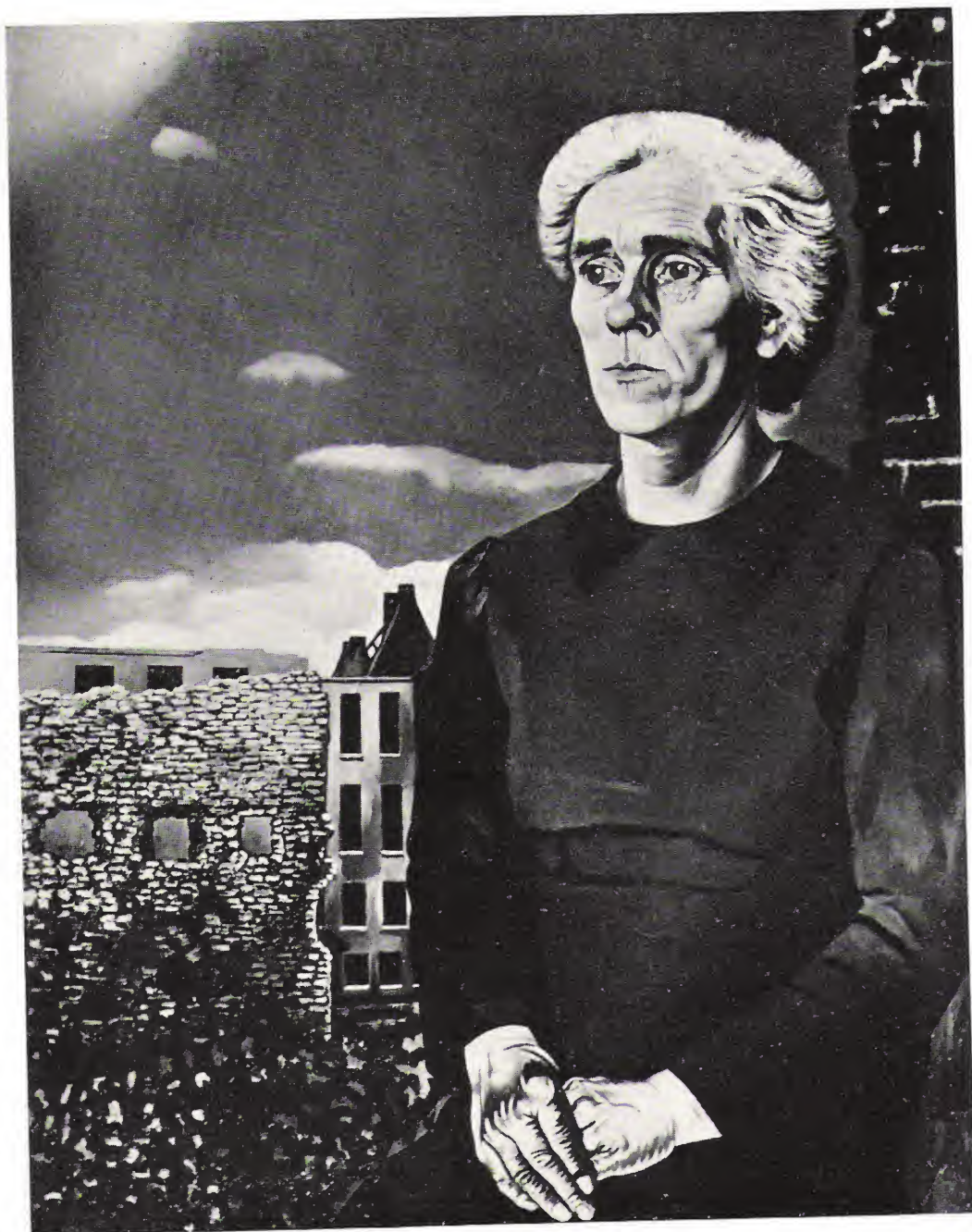
Van der Leck too looks for a unison with architecture, and he often worked next to the carpenter and the builder.

PETER ALMA, born in 1886, pupil of the Academy of The Hague, did not halt at abstraction, which with him never attained a proper equilibrium. The human figure re-emerged in his work, not in portrayal but as an idea — heads, eyes, positions of the body — which symbolizes action or thought. He thus arrives at monumentality without an esoteric symbolism. His interest remains the structure rather than the form of things.

Alma is, like Van der Leck, very much a social painter. He wishes to picture man not as an individual but from the social viewpoint, seen in his relations with his fellow-men. The murals he did in Amsterdam could indeed be described as "municipal art" — strong in their community sense, depressing sometimes in their lack of humor.

A New Generation of Realists. The painters who followed The Style could be only a handful. Others in the meantime found their spiritual home in an opposite camp, in a new realism.

CHARLEY TOOROP, born in 1890, is the daughter of the painter Jan Toorop. For many years she has been working in Bergen, but — with the possible exception of an initial period — without belonging to that school. Her father's time, and his symbolism, have influenced her thought, not her form. A strong and highly energetic woman, she paints as if sculpting, in simple, hard and pure movements, in dull red-brown and deep blue. Her art is aggressive and human, its plasticism almost exaggerated, more than life-size. She has defended the abstractionists and come up against much opposition herself. In her more-than-realism she has found a very personal "hand-writing." She is not afraid to abandon physical space, and thus she creates a spiritual space which sets reality on a higher basis. Her art transfigures the intentional ugliness and vulgarity of many of her subjects.



Charley Toorop: *Woman In Front of A Ruin*



Willem Schuhmacher: *Still Life*

In her "Meal of the friends" she put all of the sense of community, of direction, into the group; yet each one of them seems of a haunting loneliness.

"Woman in front of a ruin" shows a grey woman with a sharply lined face, the wife of a laborer. She is sitting with her hands in her lap. To the side of her are the war-scarred remains of a house. There is nothing pathetic in her face, nothing beaten; she stares ahead with an immobile, clear, piercing look. It is almost as if she were laughing inwardly.

Finally, the self-portraits of Charley Toorop show all her force: in her brush-strokes and again in her own face. In "Three generations," a painting on which she worked between 1941 and 1950, she is seated below and to the side of an enormous mask of Jan Toorop. Behind her stands her son Edgar Fernhout, he too a painter. Over his shoulder one looks out of the window at the bare branches of a tree. The paintress is at her easel, holding up a pencil in a mesmerizing gesture, as if it were a magic wand.

WILLEM SCHUHMACHER, born in 1894, was initially guided by Bergen and by Le Fauconnier. In the twenties he too began painting in that cool, detailed, very careful way, with sharp accent on the expression of matter but as much on the expression of the soul behind it, which has tentatively been labeled "new realism."

A tender grey tone dominates Schuhmacher's canvas, on which he admits only small touches of color; a soft light seems to radiate from his subjects and place them in an unrestraining, timeless space. It is here that he stands on the threshold of surrealism.

Schuhmacher is striving for perfection; he is a brilliant draftsman and a very serious painter.

JOHN RAEDECKER, born in 1885, pupil of the Amsterdam and Antwerp academies, is primarily known as one of Holland's foremost sculptors. He has created many portraits of tenderness and mysterious power.

HENK HENRIET, realist and expressionist, was self-taught. From him we have psychologically brilliant portraits, landscapes and groups of children. He was a man of intense humanity which his very able hand knew how to transform into drawing. His death in German captivity came just before the end of the war.



Albert Carel Willink: *Landscape with Statue*

GERARD HORDIJK studied architectural engineering before he became a painter, and he has always remained interested in murals, of which he did many in Amsterdam and also, during the forties, in New York. Like him, WILLEM POL shows a strong affection for the "colors of Paris," reminding one of Raoul Dufy. Pol has worked for many years in southern Europe, and in Indonesia. There is nothing shocking or controversial in his well-balanced work, in which he achieves a simple harmony. WIM SCHIPPERS, who also worked in Indonesia for a long time, belongs to the same group. KEES ANDREA, who was taught at the Academy of The Hague, now teaches painting at the Free School in the same city. His is a joyful, almost child-like realism. EDGAR FERNHOUT, son of Charley Toorop, now works in Amsterdam after a period in France and Italy. He too is engrossed in the new realism, in the "struggle with nature."

Magic Realism. Long debates on the term realism have not led to clear conclusions. Obviously; for the terminology of the world of art cannot be set down in fool-proof definitions. Some critics would refuse to call a painter like Charley Toorop a realist or a new realist, but they would accept the name *magic realist* for her; magic realism being understood as that school of highly refined and detailed realism which pictures matter not for its own sake but only for the sake of the mystery surrounding it, for the cosmic truths which are not completely contained but only anchored in men and things around us. No one then can say where the borderline lies, and when a division is made between "new realists" and "magic realists" we do but hold that the artists of the first category are more interested in matter-for-its-own-sake than those of the latter.

A hundred years ago Matthijs Maris sought a "higher truth than that of nature" in vague and fantastic forms. The painters of magic realism go the opposite way — looking for revelation in an un-natural, dream-like precision.

ALBERT CAREL WILLINK was born in Amsterdam in the year 1900. He studied in Berlin; then, after years of abstractionism, found his own form. He is the first representative of magic realism in The Netherlands. The Italian futurists Carrà, Severini, and Di Chirico are of importance in his development.



Albert Carel Willink: *Bad News*

Willink paints in sober colors and with a supreme technique. He puts a "normal," well-dressed man in an empty street, a passer-by in front of a dull building, a group of incidental tourists wandering through the Roman Colosseum. Sometimes surrealism enters; a strange forgotten statue in a bare landscape. It is a surrealism born from, the shadow of, reality.

Willink has often used the anecdotal, the irony of a situation, but in later years he abandoned these as superfluous to his purpose. The objection has been raised against him that he himself does not escape that dull "middle-class ugliness" which he opposes; but by the very fact of undergoing it, he is so eminently able to put it before us in its nakedness.

In "Bad news" we see a man walk along a street; behind him someone comes with a letter. Without effects (one could say: because of the absence of any effects), Willink has created an almost intolerable suspense of horror. But that he does not even need this "literary" association is shown in a painting like "New constructions." Three houses stand on an empty street, there is a long fence, the foreground of cobblestones is light. There are bare branches next to the house in front. The light, which is blinking and timeless, throws false, hard shadows; there is but a ray of it in the dark sky, reflected in the glass of the windows. These windows only reflect, we see nothing through them and we know that there is nothing to see. The houses are dead. A newspaper flutters high in the sky.

In a painting like this Willink is not picturing the desolation of a suburb. It is life itself which is his subject. This empty street, seen with a clarity which only our minds, not our eyes, can achieve, does not exist in time. So a town might look after mankind had destroyed itself. It is a terrible mirror, held up for modern man.

RAOUL HYNCKES, born in 1893, is of Dutch-Belgian descent. Hynckes started out in impressionistic work, of which he later destroyed a large part. In the early thirties he came to the realism of the magic, doing many still lifes in which naked trees, chains, nails and even flowers conjure up an atmosphere of death. Again, it is Hynckes's objects which hypnotize us, but his is no objective art. His reality is placed in the mysterious space of his own creating, in light which comes from no



Raoul Hynckes: *Still Life*



Pyke Koch: *Bertha of Antwerp*



Dick Ket: *Still Life With Pietà*

sun or earthly source, and which betrays no hour of day. It has *only* the aspect in common with reality outside of the canvas. It is on this no longer paradoxical "only" that our accent falls. "Society has to distinguish and evaluate," Hynckes once wrote, ". . . which is a difficult task. Because often it prefers semblance to essence, the agreeable to the beautiful, passion to love, and above all: the lie rather than the truth."

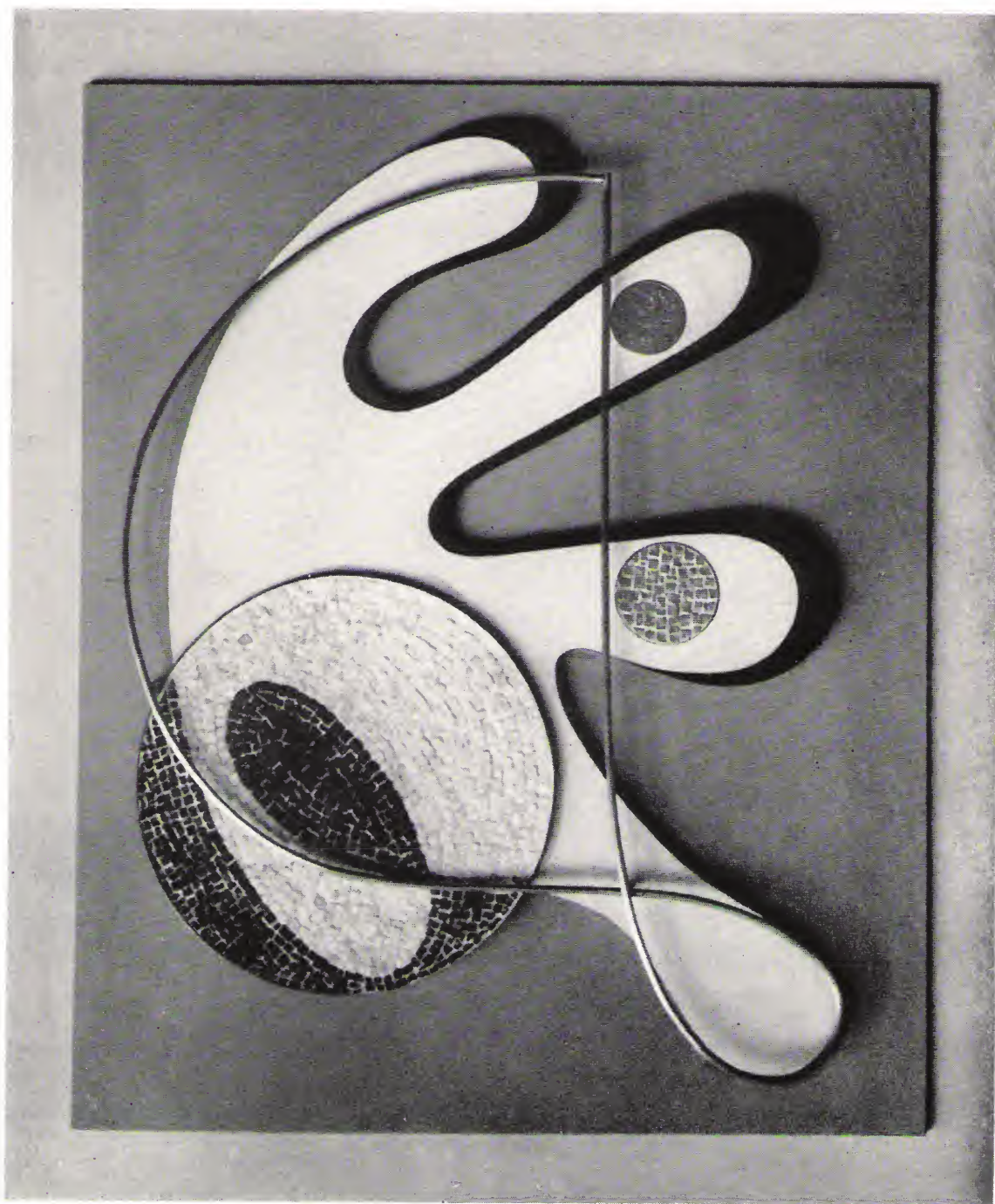
A painter close in spirit to Hynckes is PYKE KOCH, eight years his junior. Koch is a self-taught painter who has occupied himself with the study of the technical secrets of the old masters.

In his work he shows his preoccupation with man, with the conflict between our ideals and our world. He paints in dark and light, using little color. There is bitterness and tragedy in his over-real paintings, but also the artist's joy of creation. In his merciless clarity he attacks our contentment based on blindness.

DICK KET (1902-1940) was by a heart condition forced into a state of semi-retirement, in which he painted many self-portraits and still lifes. He was very critical of his own work, constantly striving for a perfection of detail. His objects assumed a symbolic strength, and tell us of the mystery of death which occupied the artist so much.

More Experiments. The Netherlands has an estimated four thousand living professional painters, and we are thoroughly aware of the impossibility of doing justice to even a small percentage of them. There are many among the youngest generation who "show promise," but of whom it is too early to say anything definite. Surrealism and abstractionism are still very much alive. Who can say, after seeing one or two works of an artist, whether he is sincere or bluffing, whether he is on his way to a new form or just evading the painful fact that he cannot draw very well? Time alone, which so often and so cruelly showers recognition on the artist at the end of a hard life or only after his death, can tell. With this as a reservation, a few names must be mentioned.

PIET OUBORG, born in 1893, belongs in his work to these young experimentalists. After spending twenty years of his life as a teacher of drawing at schools in the Netherlands East Indies, he came to The Hague in 1939. In his forties his drawings and paintings were surrealistic; Ouborg was interested in the Oriental mask, which he used as



César Domela Nieuwenhuys: *Tableau-Objet*

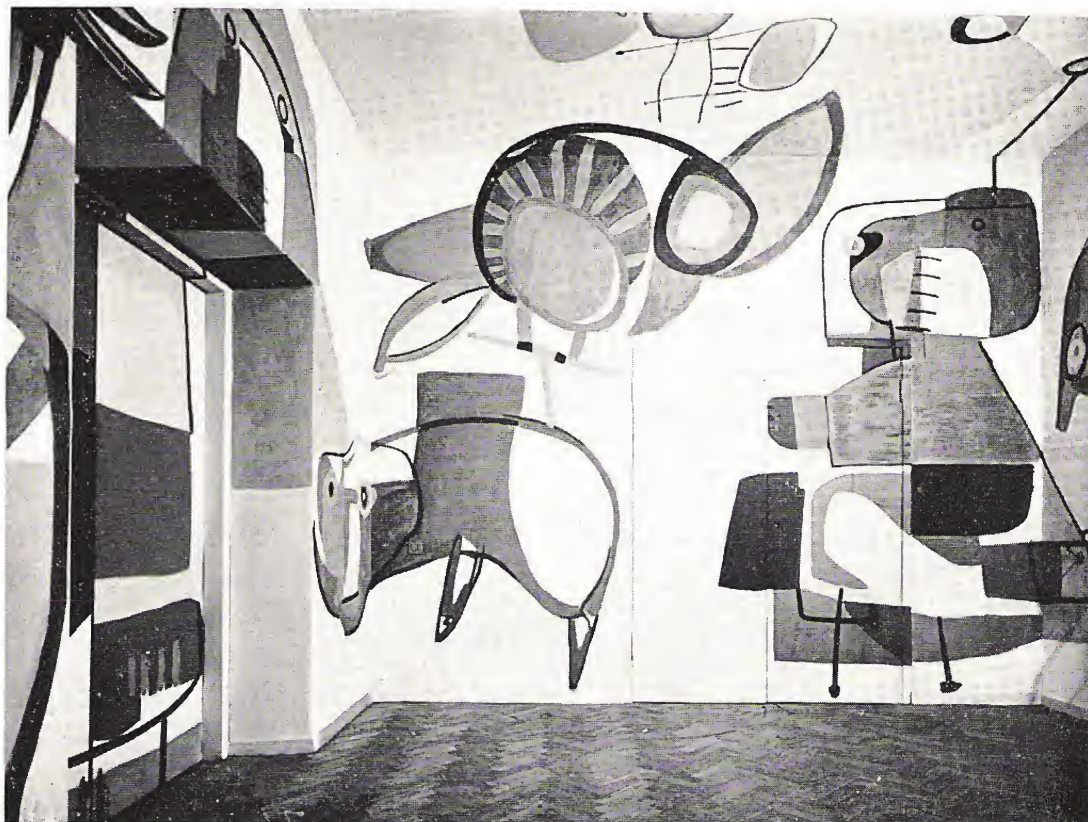
a symbol. Exotic art is closely linked to Western experimental art, and the introduction of the magic suited Ouborg's endeavors. In later years he sought to put his ideas on canvas "in rhythms" and no longer through forms borrowed from nature. He thus came to a waving, un-architectural abstractionism.

Of Ouborg's generation is CÉSAR DOMELA NIEUWENHUYNS, who with impressive sincerity has pursued the road of pure constructive abstractionism for many years. This road has led him to the *tableau-objet*, in which the painter looks for a more perfect balance by entering the realm of sculpture and adding objects of wood, glass or metal to the surface of his canvas. Domela works in Paris.

KAREL APPEL, one of the youngest in years, is an abstractionist adopting remnants of natural form. He paints in sharp lines and in a few clear colors. His work has not yet achieved the communicative quality which would make it interesting for a wider public. The same can be said of the painter CORNEILLE. AART DE HAAS, born in 1921, is of Appel's age. Both of them have suffered from adverse newspaper publicity which ridiculed their work. De Haas paints in a fantastic deformation which is however free from any pretentiousness. His most important work up to now is a series of frescoes in the twelfth century Catholic church of Wahlwiller, in the south of The Netherlands. Here De Haas has shown that non-realistic art can speak to an unsophisticated public. The church-going farmers came, after their initial astonishment, to an appreciation of his murals whose vague, mystic timelessness seemed to speak to them more truly of the wonders than traditional church art. De Haas's work has however started a bitter controversy among church authorities.

HARRY VAN KRUININGEN paints in free form; FRIEDA HUNZIKER is a purely non-objective paintress; MELLE, still not very well known, is an interesting surrealist. The Frisian painter G. BENNER, does gouaches in an expressionist mood. Many of the younger painters interest themselves in graphic and applied art, looking for a closer contact with society and, more often than not, forced in that direction by the needs of the day. LEX HORN and ALBERT MUYS are muralists; AART VAN DOBBENBURGH and M. C. ESCHER are prominent graphic artists.

Also mainly occupied with graphic art are the artists of the group THE WINDOW ("Het Venster") which came into being in 1949. Short-



Karel Appel: *Mural*

age of accommodation in post-war Rotterdam brought them together in a "Neighborhood House" which later became the center of many other artistic activities. The graphic arts of The Netherlands are, however, a subject in themselves and we must halt here.

It has been said that there is no Art, only artists. In the same vein we can state that there is no such thing as "Dutch art," but that there are Dutch artists; and we might discover that they often have more in common than their nationality. It would be dangerous to embark on a heavy-handed definition of what is typical about them. "Seriousness" might seem an easy answer — but then, so many of them are fantastic or joyful, and what artist worth that name is not basically serious?

All of these painters have passed through the naturalistic school. It was a giant step each had to take after that, a step which brought them misunderstanding, ridicule, and often hunger. It is to their honor that they had the strength for this in a country with so rich a past in the art of naturalistic painting; and it is one of many signs that the art of Europe is very much a living affair.

The query now as to whether one is "for" or "against" modern painting has really not much point. For when art is obscure, it is not only the painter's but also our responsibility. The painter cannot put up his easel in the museum and copy the masters of the past. By the very nature of his calling he has to go out and meet new challenges. If his art is obscure, it is because we have failed to make those demands on his creativeness which society used to make until not so very long ago. It was not so long ago that the artist stopped being the craftsman who supplied what society demanded for its religion, its houses, its portraits, and became the isolated seeker who works away in his studio, hoping for the benevolent visitor who might buy a piece. It is up to us to strengthen the bond anew. No one will say that we are not in great need of more beauty in our life.

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